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ABSTRACT

This lesson plan utilizes poems and quotations of things said by women who served in the Vietnam War as a means of helping students to understand the War and its impact on those directly involved. Procedures for teaching the lesson, small group discussion questions, a 12-item list of references, and all materials containing the poems and quotations are included. (DB)

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THE VIETNAM WAR THROUGH THE WORDS OF AMERICAN WOMEN WHO WERE THERE

A Lesson Plan

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The three poems: The "'Vietnam Vet'"; "Vietnam, Oppressive Heat" and "Middle East Montage" appear in Visions of War, Dreams of Peace (1991). New York, Warner Books. The book is a collection of poems written by women who served in Vietnam and is edited by Lynda Van DeVanter and Joan A. Furey Royalties from the sale of this book are being donated to the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project, Inc. Washington, D. C. The author wishes to thank WARNER BOOKS for permission to use the poems.

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THE VIETNAM WAR THROUGH THE WORDS OF AMERICAN WOMEN WHO WERE THERE

Time: 1 to 2 class periods

Objectives:

1. Given poems written by women who served in the Vietnam War, students will identify the attitudes and feelings expressed in the poems.

2. Given quotations made by women who served in Vietnam, students will identify various view points about the Vietnam War.

3. Students will attempt to identify those statements made by nurses from those of the journalists and the non-medical military personnel.

4. Students will offer reasons to explain why they believe the women held their various views.

5. Students will identify stressful factors associated with serving in the war in Vietnam that impacted the women working in Vietnam during the war.

6. Students will express their views and feelings about the women whose words they have read and analyzed.

7. Students will tell what they believe to be the best ways to handle stress and identify the ways the women handled their stress.

8. Students will predict which of the women's statements reveal that they suffered greatly from PTSD and offer reasons for their predictions.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

Introduction:

Teacher displays and has read one or more transparancies containing poems written by women who served in Vietnam concerning war. Teacher asks, "What are some of the things that these women are saying about war?" "Are you surprised by any of these statements?" "What are your sources of information about the women who served in Vietnam?" "Have you ever encountered any first hand accounts from the women or are your sources second hand or only guesses?" Ask for a show of hands for each type of data.

"Today you have encountered some primary data in these poems and you are going to encounter some quotations from women who served in Vietnam during the war. All are made by American women, but only some were affiliated with the U.S. military."

Development:

Assign students to small groups. Explain the procedures for the groups.

1. Each group receives a set of quotations which they distribute among themselves.
2. Each individual reads what they have been given and then shares what they have read with others in the group by reading the quotations to the group.
3. The group discusses a set of guiding questions and uses the quotations to assist them in answering the questions. Display

the transparancy containing the discussion questions and/or provide each group with a list of the questions.

Allow at least 30 minutes for the group discussion. Monitor groups to determine their progress and actual time needed.

Closure:

Summarize and affirm or challenge the groups conclusions through a whole class discussion. Use the following list of questions to stimulate the discussion:

1. How do these quotations and poems make you feel?
2. Which women do you think faced the most stressful situations during the war? Why?
3. What do you think are the best ways to cope with stress?
4. List 5 or 6 things that might have happened in Vietnam that would have caused the women great stress.
5. Why do you think these women went to Vietnam?

Be certain that students make logical predictions and use the data from the quotations to support their ideas.

Remind the students of the following facts.

1. Women did not receive help from the military for their physical and emotional problems until several years after the men started receiving help.
2. The medical workers have been one of the largest groups who have been treated for more sever symptoms of PTSD. About 1300 female officers from all branches of the services served in Vietnam and about 7500 nurses served in

Vietnam. Many other women served in the hospitals that received the evacuated wounded within hours or days of their injuries.

3. Women did not have "violent" outlets for their stress such as firing guns in anger or fighting commonly used by some men.
4. Red Cross SRAO (Donut Dollies) still have no claim for help with their PTSD or medical problems or concerns about agent orange related health concerns from the U.S. government. Some of the veterans' centers have open their facilities to them. (However, they can bring a law suit against the U. S. government which military and government employees can not do. What do the students think would be the likely outcome of such actions?)
5. Women veterans of the Vietnam war have been leaders for the recognition of military women in monuments in Washington D. C. and for equal benefits for female veteran.

Quotation: Red Cross SRAO- Cherie Rankin. Nurses- Pat Johnson, Lynda Van Devanter, Nancy I Jones, Maggi Arriola and Joan Craigwell. Journalists- Jurate Kazickas, Liz Trotta, Martha Gellhorn and Philippa Schuyler. Jeanne Holm, Director WAF was the highest ranking female officer in the Air Force during the Vietnam War.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What emotions or feelings are expressed by the women?

2. Which quotations do you think were made by nurses? which by journalists? which by women in other occupations?

3. What attitudes or values are expressed by each?

4. Does either group appear to be more pro-war or anti-war?

5. What do you think might account for the differences in the views of these groups?

6. How do you think the women coped with the issues and stresses of the war? What evidence is there in their poems or quotations to support your answers?

7. What additional ways to cope with stress not mentioned in the quotations and poems might the women have used while in Vietnam?

8. How do you think they coped since returning to the U.S.?

9. What methods do you think are the most productive in dealing with stress? Why?

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Poems from Visions of War, Dreams of Peace for use during the introduction.
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MIDDLE EAST MONTAGE

Steamy summer sunup
Wearily I sip my morning coffee and
Watch the early news.
A C-130 unloads in the background
The line of soldiers marching across the screen
Wears desert sand camouflage instead of jungle green.
And they're
still
just
kids.

Bryant interviews
Two fresh, young nurses in fatigues.
"We're here to do our part—committed to our country's goals."
"We're highly trained and skilled—prepared for anything."
"We've worked civilian ER's, so we've seen it all."
A chill runs through me
My God, they
have
no
idea.

Lynda Van Devanter Buckley
1990

THE "VIETNAM VET"

The "Vietnam Vet"
people instantly conjure
their own picture
in their mind

Is it ever of
a woman?
Huddled . . . somewhere . . .
alone
sleeping
trying desperately to shut out the world
that shut her out
or
that disappeared
as she reached out to trust it

Is it ever
that vision?
that woman?

Norma J. Griffiths
1982

VIETNAM, OPPRESSIVE HEAT

Vietnam, Oppressive Heat—
The Malignant Stench Compressing The Senselessness Of—
Dying Life And Living Death
Of Frenzy, Fear, Frustration—
Conceived By Doubt, Deceit And Damnation.
Wrought of Human Sacrifice—
Theirs And,
Ours—

Penny Kettlewell
1990

"After twenty-seven years of military friction, war has become monotonous in Vietnam. The Vietnamese soldier, who has never known a state of peace, has become very casual about the whole affair.

Can one blame them for their terrific desertion rate? Or for their frequently lazy approach to combat? Vietnamese are affectionate, sensitive men, who love their families. They are very sentimental about their wives and children. Seeing little purpose or progress in the war, they want to preserve their lives for their families. The Viet Cong are intense and ferocious fighters, because they have an ideology. Our vacillating strategies have kept those Vietnamese who are on our side from having a sense of direct commitment to the war.

....It is hard, under these circumstances, to feel sure that 'we are winning the war.' And even when you live in a city like Hue, it is difficult to know what is really going on, or to foresee what tomorrow will bring."
Philippa Schuyler.
(April 21,1967. "What Is Really Going On?" Union Leader, Manchester, New Hampshire.)

"Each of the 43 provinces in South Vietnam has a free hospital for civilians, built long ago by the French when they ruled the country. The hospital might have been adequate in peacetime; now they are all desperately overcrowded. The wounded lie on bare board beds, frequently two to a bed, on stretchers, in the corridors, anywhere. Three hundred major operations a month were the regular quota in the hospitals I saw; they were typical hospitals. ...

Martha Gellhorn.
(January, 1967. "Suffer The Little Children." Ladies' Home Journal.)

You can't imagine some of the things I saw. Before one of my first firefights I had interviewed this guy, spent three days with him, gotten to know him. He showed me pictures of his wife and kids, and he had two weeks left, and he'd been wounded twice, and he didn't believe in the war but he thought it was his duty and he was sent there. The next thing I knew, I looked over and he didn't have a head anymore."
Jurate Kazickas
(Maurer, Harry. 1989, page 232)

" I don't even remember the first time I was in a firefight. I really should, but when you're there for two years, it all blends together. Pretty soon I was in firefights all the time, and I know I saw more combat than most GIs did.... reporters who covered combat just went from one to the other. Where is it happening? Okay. Let's go there.
Jurate Kazickas
(Maurer, Harry. 1989, p.231).

"And I'm able to talk pretty freely now, without a lot of crying or pain. Now what I feel I need is recognition. There is a sense of wanting to be identified as having been in Vietnam. Not because I supported the war. No, I want to be identified because I feel that what I did over there was valuable. I want to be proud of that. Because for so long I was ashamed. For so long I was afraid people would think I supported the war." Cherie Rankin

(Marshall, K. 1987, p. 78.)

"... all of us in some way had to harden our hearts to much of the nonmilitary agony as well, the Amerasian infants abandoned in the villages, the Vietnamese children maimed and scarred. I stopped looking at them early in the game-- the scrawny arms and dirty knees, the rags for clothes, the unblinking almond eyes asking questions I couldn't answer. Combat wasn't as lethal as thinking about these children could be...." Liz Trotta.
(Trotta, L. 1991, p. 137.)

"Women fought as hard as the men to build this country and shot as many Indians... you'd think we were a bunch of sissies."
Anonymous, 1966. (Holm, J. 1982, p.209.)

"Someday this will end and I'll go home and wear cute white uniforms and work and eight-hour day and sleep without nightmares and I'll be happy and satisfied with my county hospital pediatric ward job and I'll forget I ever lived in this horror and who are your trying to kid anyway, Jones?"
(Jones, 1971.)

"I lost my direction and found myself becoming a person I would never have been before Vietnam.... Like thousands of Americans, I began calling the Vietnamese- both friendly and enemy- 'gooks.' I would have though I was above that sort of racism; after all, hadn't I marched in the United States for civil rights like a good Catholic girl who believed all oppression was wrong?... Now I saw the Vietnamese as nothing more than a group of thieves and

murders....They were the ones who kept killing American soldiers. Why should we bother saving them." Lynda Van Devanter
(Van Devanter, L. and Morgan, C. 1983, p. 156.)

" As far as having been there and what it's meant to me... I don't think I've ever been the same. I think before I went to Vietnam I was really very happy-go-lucky, freewheeling kind of person. I think I still am, but I don't think I've ever taken life as lightly as I did then.... I've never really talked about the painful part of Vietnam to anyone. mostly because I don't want to think about it myself." Pat Johnson.
(Walker, K. 1985. p. 65.)

"WAF airmen continually ask me why they are not allowed to 'pull their share of the burden in Southeast Asia when men who have families must go involuntarily, and some may now be threatened with second tours. These women know tht nurses, civil service employees, WAC's and Red Cross women are serving in Southeast Asia and they can find no logical reason why enlisted women in the Air Force should be considered unacceptable by their own Service. While lack of housing may have been a good excuse initially, it becomes less and less acceptable as time goes on." Jeanne Holm, 1967.
(Holm, J. 1982, p.222.)

"Tet was the hardest challenge I ever faced. I went for 32 hours straight without rest. My Uniform was drenched with blood and perspiration.....I became detached in order to cope with the chaos and horror I was witnessing.

When Tet finally eased up, I attempted to wash it all away. I showered two or three times a day, but couldn't get the smell of it off me. The taste and smell still come back today when I see photographs of mass casualty situations." Joan Craigwell. (San Diego Union, Sept. 20,1987.)

"I knew I couldn't let myself cry. I couldn't allow myself to do that because if I did then I was taking time that could have been better used to help somebody else. it was important for me not to cry; in front of them because I was whole, and being whole I felt that by my presence and closeness I could help them a little bit...." Maggi Arriola. (Elshtain, J. B. 1987, p. 250.)

"...The officers looked at each other, and then at us, with what I distinctly caught as a flicker of recognition. 'You're clear for Thuong Duc -- at your own risk. Good Luck.'

The pilot dropped us like a stone into a hot LZ. A mad scramble came out, and then we ran hunched over. The warrant officer was pulling off the bread. Mortars and rockets slammed in around us, so close it seemed we would never reach the small rise about 100 yards away where the bunkers were dug....

The moment we reached the entrance to the bunker, the chopper we had just landed in took off, reached 100 feet, was hit by enemy ground fire, and spiraled down. Rough hands pushed into the bunker so there was no time to look back. Later we heard no one aboard survived.

' They're gonna try to take us,' said the young man in bandages.

Cornered. No options. No control. Just take orders and don't run out of hope. Funny how danger makes your throat close and your insides shake...."

"The night was spent in fitful sleep on the bunker floor,... When the shelling stopped before dawn, we surfaced and sat outside."

"Then, suddenly, the enemy's rockets and mortars lifted from their resting place and rained on the camp. We dived back into the bunker and waited until first light filtered through and silence returned. All I heard was a ringing in my ears. Then the far-off muffled slice of a chopper.

Deliverance!

Filthy, worn out, exulting at the chance to get out, we made a break for it. Maybe the NVA spotters were eating their morning gruel." Liz Trotta

(Trotta, L. 1991, p. 140- 144.)